

Statement from Bryan Porras-Sierra Club

The levels of benzene in the air surrounding the ITC facility are still very high and those levels can damage public health. The threat from the ITC emissions are significant. The disaster is not over because the releases of benzene and PFAS chemicals are ongoing. We need to take immediate action to protect our first responders, workers near the ITC facility, and sensitive populations being affected from the ongoing emissions from the disaster.

Benzene:

Benzene is a cancer-causing petrochemical and it is one of the most harmful components of oil and gas mixtures.

Short-term exposures to benzene in the air can cause immediate effects like vomiting and nausea, drowsiness and headaches. When it touches the skin it may cause redness and blistering. However over the long term, benzene affects the bone marrow and causes leukemia. Benzene exposure also suppresses white bloods and has significant adverse effects on pregnant women and the developing fetus.

What's safe:

Even very low levels of benzene are a health concern. The state of Texas and EPA set a concern level of 180 parts per billion in the air for benzene, but other governments set a much lower warning level for benzene inhalation.

For instance, the California's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment guideline is that people not breathe benzene levels greater than 8 parts per billion (0.008 ppm) for more than one hour, and daily or weekly averages not exceed 1 part per billion. European's safety guidelines are similarly low. Workers should use respirators when benzene levels are above 100 parts per billion, a level that is most likely being routinely exceeded for people working on or near the ITC site.

However, monitoring data from the state and USEPA show that these levels are being exceeded routinely by orders of magnitude. Levels of benzene in neighborhoods up to four miles from the site are routinely exceeding the 180ppb level set by our state as dangerous. Our disaster responders are being routinely exposed to levels of benzene that should require the most protective levels of care and they are not getting that protection.

We need to take immediate action:

1. The Benzene Alert levels need to be lowered and the information needs to be real-time.
2. Community values for benzene need to be reported immediately and at levels that exceed 100ppb evacuations should occur.
3. First responders and workers near the site should be in full protective gear.

4. The state and federal government needs to start a registry of people that have been affected by exposures to these emissions.
5. Monitoring for fish and sediments need to begin now in the Ship Channel and the Galveston Bay for all the chemicals released in the fire.
6. Disposal options for the contamination must be carefully examined and Incineration of these wastes should to be rejected since PFAS chemicals do not burn.

In closing, this disaster is not over, the exposures are continuing and actions need to be taken now to protect the health of workers, first responders, and our community members.

Thank you for your kind attention to these concerns.